Information Engagement
"How Information Operates in a Permissive Environment"
by
Major Lyndon Jones

INTRODUCTION

With the publication of Army Field Manual (FM) 3.0 in Feb. 2008, the Army changed the conceptual framework for Information Operations (IO). Instead of IO performing an integrating function for the staff, the new Army information tasks institutionalize IO functions into separate staff divisions. This change is designed to better address the cognitive domain of the information environment below the operational level in a way that JP 3-13 was not designed to accomplish. FM 3.0 accomplishes this by grouping the message (Strategic Communication and Defense Support to Public Diplomacy) and the means (Leader-Soldier, Public Affairs, Psychological operations and Combat Camera) into one of five Army information tasks – Information Engagement.

U.S. Army South is the Army Service Component for U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and therefore conducts much of its operational planning with respect to Joint doctrine. However, many of the exercises within the Area of Focus (AOF) are executed below the Divisional level by forces from the reserve component (RC). Beyond the Horizon (BTH) is one such example of an Army South mission led by a Brigade-level commander in a permissive environment. With the update of FM 3.0, how does the Army translate Joint doctrine, including JP 3-13 and associated policy statements, into useful Information Engagement (IE) applications in a Theater of Operation? We will use BTH to demonstrate how employing IE in permissive environments can best support the delivery of strategic messaging.

INFORMATION ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES

Best Practice #1 – Appoint an S7 IE Officer

BTH is an exercise conducted in Southern Command's permissive AOF and carried out by Soldiers largely from the reserve component. BTH integrates engineering, medical, small unit familiarization program engagements, reciprocal platoon exchanges, subject matter expertise exchanges and state partnership activities under one umbrella. BTH makes best use of resources while simultaneously building partner nation capabilities and benefiting the affected local populations. During these missions, the S7 is the tactical commander's strategic linchpin between the operational planning and tactical implementation that translates JP 3-13

US Army South Strategic Communications Concept

into effective IE. The S7 provides the strategic key player, which facilitates continuity, effective coordination and synchronization of capabilities resulting in a more productive, and robust IE plan that enables training opportunities for reservists and supports the commander's Strategic Communication (SC) objectives.

It is imperative that an S7 IE Officer be appointed to serve on staff. The challenge of BTH begins with manning. RC brigades, battalions and companies often deploy without an S-7. US Army South's assignment of an S7 IE Action Officer has provided an effective bridge to cover potential continuity gaps. This Action Officer is responsible for planning, which begins in the early stages and continues through execution, ideally with the IE Action Officer serving as the S7. This practice has been most effective in establishing expectations for each capability based on command guidance and coordination with respective directorates, translating JP 3-13 into effective IE as outlined in FM 3.0.

Best Practice #2 - The Information Engagement Pre-deployment Tour

During the planning phase, IO is always a stated priority but frequently becomes overshadowed by logistical and operational issues. In an attempt to support IO objectives without compromising the focus, US Army South's G7, G9, the BTH exercise Commander, his S3 in coordination Military Assistance and Advisory Group and US Embassy in Santo Domingo, conducted a one-week IE Pre-deployment Tour (IEPT). The IEPT consisted of two components: 1) Key Leader engagement and 2) Media engagement. The IEPT was successful in terms of pre-deployment messaging, reaching key Partner Nation political and civic leaders as well as important media sources. Just as one would send scouts out on a route recon one needs to get an IE officer out early to meet respective key leaders. The IEPT is recommended as standard practice and serves as an effective intelligence preparation of the information environment.

The catalyst for the IEPT was NEW HORIZON 2006 – Dominican Republic. There was little or no pre-deployment messaging to inform the public of the scope and details of the exercise. As a result, Dominicans were left to draw their own conclusions. Consider the context: it is 2006 and the U.S. is engaged in the Global War on Terror. By-standers observed bulldozers on the backs of flatbed trucks driven by U.S. Soldiers moving through their towns. A generation of Dominicans vividly recalled the U.S. intervention and occupation in 1965 during the height of the Vietnam conflict. The media, unaware and always game for a sensational story ran with the negative story line. The result of this issue was that the exercise was disrupted. There

New Horizons Medical Engagement Clinic
Source: US Army Southern Command

were people who needed tooth extractions and children who needed a schoolhouse. They received neither of these. There were Soldiers who deployed expecting to train and put their skills to good use, and were left frustrated. Finally, the U.S. taxpayer got less than what a sound information strategy could have achieved.

The primary lesson learned is that U.S. Army South in coordination with the State Partnership Program through Puerto Rico's National Guard, Dominican Republic's state partner and the BTH headquarters element, led with an IEPT a month in advance of this year's exercise. The populace was given the opportunity to understand the purpose and intentions of the US presence as an invited guest and valued Partner Nation through the use of traditional media and key leader communications.

Best Practice #3 - Leader-Soldier engagement and the IE Reception Briefing

At U.S. Army South, G7 developed an IE brief that is provided as part of the overall reception brief for all BTH incoming Soldiers. The brief underscores the critical role of the leader and Soldier as strategic messengers in the context of national security. In the case of BTH, leaders and Soldiers have a unique training opportunity that enables relationships between Soldiers and Partner Nation (PN) members that can serve to directly propagate the strategic message. Therefore, Soldier language and actions should be consistent with themes and messages. Just as every Soldier is a rifleman, every Soldier is a strategic messenger and should be trained accordingly. Ultimately, a reception brief addressing leader-Soldier engagement is only as effective as the leadership that reinforces Soldier expectations throughout each Soldier's tour of duty as a strategic messenger.

The Soldier has a unique and significant role in their ability to reinforce and amplify positive actions and increase goodwill and support for the friendly mission. To reinforce Soldier expectations the G7 designed a simple yet effective assessment tool to capture the public relations posture on the ground and serve as an early warning and mitigation mechanism should concerns arise. In effect, it serves as an inside out view of how we see ourselves in relation to the local populace.

Best Practice #4 - The Public Service Announcement (PSA)

This year U.S. Army South's G7, with support from the Office of Strategic Communication, developed a template for a PSA script as means to leverage mass communication despite budget constraints. Because PSAs are based on donated media time and

Figure 1: Soldier Engagement Assessment
Source: US Army Southern Command

the benefits of BTH's medical readiness training exercises (MEDRETEs) and related services represented need-to-know public information, the PSA served as a cost-effective means to increase awareness within the construct of the partner nation's local media while also serving as a catalyst for all other BTH activities.

The PSA was initially employed in the Dominican Republic and proved to be very effective. While on the surface it gives the appearance of a simple promotional announcement, there are several subtle yet key messages. This PSA included the PN lead and ownership of BTH, the State Partnership Program between Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico and the duration of the exercise. The initial assessments were that the PSA read-script was well received and overwhelmingly preferred to the audio product. Reports indicate that recipients of the PSA were actively announcing the PSA at a frequency of greater than three times daily. Additionally, the initial recipients forwarded the read-script to their affiliates and professional peers expanding the overall coverage.

Our recommendation is to develop the PSA as a three-part package consisting of a read-script, audio format and video format. This approach accommodates radio and television formats. As a rule, the PSA should not exceed 45 seconds. The Commander may then select the highest quality of each for recommended distribution in coordination with the respective Security Cooperation Office and US Embassy.

The PSA read-script, due to its negligible production requirements, should be the minimum standard. Local populations are only one of several important audiences. The media itself is another audience and the better informed the media is, the less likely they will be to entertain and promote negative propaganda stemming from uninformed speculation.

CHALLENGES

Challenge #1 - Moving from Stovepipes to Partnerships

Conceptually, Information Engagement is sound and considerably easier to grasp as an Army information task than Joint and former Army IO doctrine.

Doctrinally, the coordination and integration of Civil-Military Operations (CMO) remains an issue of debate. Tactically, there is significant work to overcome the friction that currently exists between capabilities and their respective organizational cultures. Keeping the functions segregated into their respective "stovepipes" is inefficient and results in the underutilization of capabilities and resources. Successful Information Engagement in support of SC will come from an understanding of purpose and successful partnerships.

Challenge #2 - Educating Tactical Commanders

The Information Proponent Office at Fort Leavenworth is working hard to train enough FA30 officers to meet Army tactical level needs. The Information Officer Qualification course is currently the only course in the Army inventory that requires officers to pass an oral comprehension board as a condition of graduation. This is an important feature that enables graduates to educate the Army at-large with respect to Information Engagement and emerging doctrine.

New Horizons Medical Engagement Clinic Eye Exam
Source: US Army Southern Command

In practice, some exercises are too short to allow tactical commanders to begin learning on D-Day. With IE, timing and momentum are the keys to success. For example, New Horizon 2006 – Dominican Republic, the task force found themselves adrift responding to misinformation because the messaging was reactive versus proactive.

Trained FA30A officers, when available, not only understand but also have the ability to articulate Information Operations to tactical commanders. They need to be given the time and resources to educate commanders and shape the information environment.

Challenge #3 – Understanding Strategic Communication

Effective Strategic Communication (SC) is a top priority for leaders in the U.S. Military. However, that does not mean that every military leader conceptually understands SC. Some among our peers have been brave enough to ask the question "what is StratComm?" So what is Strategic Communication and who is responsible for it at the tactical level? SC is messaging. Just as with safety, everyone is a safety officer regardless of rank. The same applies to SC in that everyone is a strategic messenger. As with safety, in which the commander designates an officer to be responsible for the overall coordination of safety measures, the S7 serves the tactical commander as the chief communication officer. In the Army, this officer is normally FA 30 Information Operations trained individual responsible for incorporating SC into all operations, actions, activities and products in order to maximize available capabilities, means and methods.

In Joint commands, however, the SC may fall in a separate directorate. For that reason, there is a need to doctrinally differentiate from JP 3-13 to FM 3-0 as it applies to the Tactical Commander so as not to confuse it with IE. IE is the broad umbrella that incorporates both the message (SC) and the means. Although Civil Affairs (CA) is not included in IE's broad umbrella as a doctrinal capability it is a means and key enabler in support of strategic messaging at the grassroots through key leader engagement and civic action projects.

Challenge #4 – J-Staff versus S-Staff

Planning at the tactical level, according to FM 3-0 and FM 5-0, is intentionally and inherently different for Army and Joint forces. This excerpt from FM 3-0 is instructive:

> *Army forces do not use the joint systems analysis of the operational environment, effects-based approach to planning, or effects assessment. These planning and assessment methods are intended for use at the strategic and operational levels by properly resourced joint staffs.* **FM 3-0**

New Horizons Medical Engagement Surgical Clinic
Source: US Army Southern Command

It is important to understand that while a sprinkling of multi-service may constitute joint forces it doesn't necessarily constitute a Joint staff or J-Staff. This is important because a J-Staff implies joint doctrine. As already outlined in the introduction, Joint IO doctrine is not designed to address the cognitive domain below the operational level. Operational planning for the J-Staff is inherently more applicable to the strategic and operational levels. The S-Staff represents the tactical implementation through the Army Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) that takes place at Division and below. The roles and responsibilities of the S7 should remain aligned with tactical Army doctrine including MDMP and the conduct of the tactical IE mission and SC in order to better address the cognitive domain of the information environment.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have provided a snapshot of the current state of IE for the permissive environment within a Service Component Command. We have also provided very specific recommendations and best practices for the IE practitioner to employ immediately. The Information Engagement Pre-deployment Tour, in support of pre-deployment messaging requirements, is the primary method for deploying the best practices described in advance of an operation, activity or action in a permissive environment. With representation from each participating capability to include Civil Affairs, coupled with command and staff participation, this is effective in promoting the partnership and educating the tactical commander regarding IE and strategic messaging. Every effort must be made by planners to support this activity and ensure the selection and availability of key leadership for this requirement.

One additional recommendation, from a professional development standpoint, is to implement a system or functional area cross training and assignment to promote the migration from "stovepipe" to partnership and promote education within staff and command structures. Using the Army example, a PAO (46A) cross-trained and assigned in IO (30A) or

Figure 2: Soup Bowl Approach to Information Engagement
Source: US Army Southern Command

vice versa would enable the collaborative partnerships necessary.

Parting Shots:

I want to take a few words and thank all of the professional IO warriors and operators worldwide who support this publication. IO Sphere distribution has grown in a "viral" way in the past 3 years and the number of subscribers from all aspects of military, intelligence, diplomatic, and commercial communities of interest has grown with the distribution. Whether your profession calls it Information Operations, Communications, or Marketing the concepts that are discussed in IO Sphere are contemporary and relevant. It takes the entire community to make this publication work and I sincerely appreciate everyone's participation. A special thanks to Mr. Mark Johnson as the Director of the JIOWC and tremendous supporter of IO Sphere, and finally, to Lieutenant Colonel Frank DeCarvalho who serves as the executive editor and provides the leadership needed to keep the journal a viable and contributing periodical. Thank you all.

The Editor